



SCOP

Scop (skop) OE Scop orf sceop

< dOHG scoph, scof

(poetry, fiction, sporty, jest)

An Old English poet or minstrel



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SCOP

by

Avila's Students

Acknowledgements...

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| Editor-In-Chief | Crystal A. Moore |
| Editors | Christina Kirk Seyko Bond Mellisa Washburn |
| Advisor | Stanley E. Banks |

Awards

Poetry Award
“Family Advice” Jessica Agard

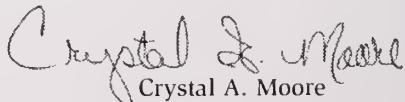
Honorable Mention
“September 11, 2001” Lauren Takemoto

From The Editor...

One of the great things about writing is that our words are forever in the consciousness of the universe. They are there for generations upon generations to read and learn from. Words tell a story, either our own or the story of our world. It is our impressions and expressions that make writing a story, a poem, a play, or an essay so great. We have words at our disposal to describe every feeling we have, and every point of view that needs to be set loose.

Creativity, on the other hand, is a tricky subject. Many artists feel they are the true creators of creativity. Some musicians feel they have the key to the lock with their melody filled songs. Even some writers feel they own the rights to creativity, but the truth is we all are the bearers of this cleverness. We create every time we walk outside our front door. We add imagination to business, psychology, medicine, and even mathematics. We don't all have to call ourselves artists to believe that we can add vision to all that we do in our lives.

This issue of the Scop includes work from students of all different academic backgrounds taking a chance on producing writings that will forever be on print for the world to see. Some of them call themselves artists; others are probably trying something new. They are all combining what they form in everyday life and putting their feelings and points of view on paper. This issue also spotlights the beauty of diversity by featuring a broad spectrum of creative writing. We have poems, essays, a short story, and a play ranging in topics from pregnancy to boy bands. In this magazine, the reader will come away with a sense of if they can do it, so can I. The goal of creative writing is to throw an original thought into the air and let it fall into different individual interpretations.



Crystal A. Moore

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Cultivars

Darkness

JOSH ELLINGTON

I am the darkness that surrounds you,
the inner hatred, the devourer.
Inside of you I find your passion,
in which I take your fantasy to the next step.
I envelop your mind with cold fear,
I surround you with comfort of nothingness.

I am what you fear, and love;
the days you want to be alone, I am you.
Each day starts in me, ends in me,
there is no escape.
You might as well surrender to me,
for I am the only way.

I am your inner demons which plague your nightmares,
I am your security which is as false as the gun at your side.
Abuse me for I cannot be harmed;
love me for I am always there.
Sacrifice me for your petty needs,
get down and pray to me.

Your inner body is now mine,
when you walk, when you pray.
You owe me your very existence,
for that is where you came from.

I am your everything,
yet I am nothing.

Love me, Kill me, Burn me, Thrill me.

The Cycle

JOSH ELLINGTON

Humans, the most forsaken of earth's creatures.
Most things they create are built to destroy.
Convinced by the vision of superiority, they slaughter on.

The children are given gifts out of generosity; in turn they expect it.
The teenagers find any and all excuses for rebellion only to be heard.
The adults grow into their ways, peering at the world as a cold, dark hell.
The elderly slowly drift away into the never-ending sleep, only to be forgotten.
The dead pillage the world for answers and favors, being cast out by their kind.

The children are the signs of innocence, which dissipate over time.
The teenagers are the life and spirit, which once dwelled in all.
The adults show stability, fortification and provide a place of familiarity.
The elderly, most experienced, blessed with the light of hope and the will that never dies.
The dead build ways to the other side, eventually finding their answers and move on.

Some of their creations push the Scissors of Fate back and eventually away.

The children are the most open minded of the ages, moldable as fresh clay.
The teenagers are taking the lead in movements for togetherness and awareness.
The adults are creating machines to better the lives of millions.
The elderly are the reminders of what it used to be like and teachers of what can be done.
The dead enlighten and comfort the living who can see them,
giving sight to others despite their demise.
People are capable of such beautiful things, also capable of mass destruction.
As earth's prize species, their ungratefulness can be forgiven.

Echoes

JOSH ELLINGTON

A burst of sound pours from my soul,
flowing toward every soul in existence.
A part of me flies faster than I ever could,
all those with open hearts hear my call.

I sit and wait for a response in the darkness,
the reflection of another being is all I hunger for.
Waiting, I strain my perception to gather some sort of response,
only to wait in vain.

The flicker of my soul sent off seconds ago,
comes back with the darkest news.

For that is the only thing I hear,
every soul in existence missed my call.

I hear my call come back to me again,
only fainter than before.

As time passes by, I realize that my burst is dying;
that for every second I wait, I lose this much more.

I weigh the options of calling again,
only to have my echoes come chasing me.

The sounds of my own voice come crashing into me,
I feel my own soul burst, crushing every thought in my mind.

The agony comes crashing like waves of blood,
the tide of hatred splashes on my face.

I begin to absorb this pain that comes at me,
only to realize that is my own at my feet.

4

Echoes, they are short flickers of life,
not much different from ourselves.

We come into existence, make our call,
not all are heard or acknowledged.

Just remember that we are here for such a short time,
love all that you can, listen to all those around you.
Or we will just fade into the night air with no one that was moved.

Creative Juices

AMY MORRIS

Damn

I loathe creative pressure--

Night before poetry class,

Nothing on paper but

Pencil doodles and question marks,

My mind a ball of twisted rubber bands.

THINK THINK THINK booms the clock beside me in rhythmic torture

As I search my tangled brain,

Straining for profound, clever, funny--

Anything disguised as poetry.

Instead silence answers my screams for help,

5

My mind held hostage in a creative siege

With no mild epiphany to come.

Damn

This dark unhealthy presence.

Grandma and Grandpa's Goodbye

AMY MORRIS

"Are you afraid?"
Grandma turned
to her white starched man.

"No, I'll be fine,"
Grandpa nodded,
gap-toothed and brave.

"I'll miss your bad jokes,"
Grandma sobbed
through limp crumbled tissue.

"I'll miss your fried chicken,"
Grandpa choked
in soft crackling tone.

"I'll tend to your garden,"
Grandma melted
into his thin tight frame.

"Just pray for our country,"
Grandpa winked
and departed for war.

Heaven

AMY MORRIS

Closing my eyes, I imagine The place
Brimming with God's light,
Warm on my face.

Cupping my ears, I imagine Its sound
Children playing and giggling,
Laughter all around

Cleansing my mind, I imagine His voice
Calling my name,
Singing rejoice

Opening my heart, I imagine My fate
Unconditional love
Greets me at the gate.

For A Brief Moment

AMY MORRIS

Eyes open leisurely
to Saturday morning calm,
lace curtains gently blowing
through open window,
sprinkling intricate patterns
and chilly spring breeze across
tranquil body and mind.

Yawning, stretching, curling
into quilted ball beside
slow rhythmic breathing,
snuggling deeper
as distant train whistle
hums in synchronized harmony
with soprano wind chimes.

Relaxed in serene drowsiness
and meditative...

BANG BANG BANG

"Mommy," little voice demands
on other side of wood barrier,
"I want pancakes for breakfast..."

Alanis

MELISSA STOVALL

The window washer peeps in as

a woman crawls out from under her desk.

Her skirt is hiked up, another mid-day

blow job for the upper-level intern.

The woman weaves around the corner as

her boss stares grievingly at the wall.

His mother-in-law is in town, killing his

plans for an early day and golf with his old friends.

The boss slides into an afternoon meeting as

a flustered blue jay flies by the office window.

He is weaving through the sky, cursing relentlessly

to demolish the squeaky-clean window that murdered his son.

The blue jay focuses his revenge on hefty shoulders as

they stiffen then shudder. The unknowing

window washer working his hardest to make a living,

wondering why a bird has just shit on him.

The Trinity

MELISSA STOVALL

He is inside of me,

Pleading to let his greatness glow.

But I have denied him,

Until now.

He has always been there

Praying that I will see the light.

But I have been lost,

Until today.

He lingers queasingly close,

Hoping that I notice nature's beauty.

But I have been blind,

Until I met him.

10

He breathes, "A lost child is found,"

Knowing that he has opened the door.

I am alive and sober,

Until forever.

60 + lbs.

MELISSA STOVALL

5- I'm normal. I'll be fine.

10- I had a bad month. I was hungry.

20- Halfway there? Nope, not even close.

30- I'll slow down. How about some ice cream?

40- Where is my boyfriend? I don't need him anyway.

50- Good lord huge woman! Who gives a shit what anyone thinks.

60 + Do I actually have a baby in there, or just layers of unneeded fat?

Awake in darkness,

Stomach searching for chocolate.

Empty fridge,

Disappointed pounding inside.

A Discussion

CHRISTINA KIRK

A question to satisfy:

His hands that will never know

He wonders aloud,

"How can you tell?"

And though I have never

Kneaded, massaged

Or cupped a pair myself,

Intuition answers firmly,

"Honey, if they don't move

When she moves,

They're fake."

\$150/hour (which is 45 minutes)

CHRISTINA KIRK

I've given up self-torture

Junked angst

With my last youthful mistake --

With 3 piercings

Harley jacket

But no bike.

I've given up self-pity

Trashed Daddy

With the last time he hurt me --

When he donated

The jackpot

That made me.

I've given up self-shit

Recycled me

With nothing left

But 15 minutes

To savor my

Shrink-wrapped

Sanity.

Why Girls Like Stickshifts

CHRISTINA KIRK

The Automatic Girl

Favors mission style --
Lies on her back
Stares at the ceiling
Lets him coast
From A to B
And bides her time
Like an ugly wallflower
In panties wet
With Brad Pitt
At homecoming.

The Manual Girl

Teases power pedals --
Pump me here
Corner me there
Braces her feet
So she can ride ponies
Straddle the engine
Humming against her fingertips
Grab that shifting dildo
Flick, flip and faster:

Start one

Heave three

Arch five

Down two

Grind four

Top speed!

Personal Census

CHRISTINA KIRK

My pencil hovers over the
Looming question of the day --
White? Yellow?
Honky? Gook?
Potatoes? Rice?
Red neck? Slant eyes?
Jesus? Buddha?
I feel neither inclined --
Check other.



The Story of Echo Boomers

CHRISTINA KIRK

The Merchants of Cool
Prey on little children
Insert chips behind their ears:
"Gotta have it, gotta have it"
 Trade teddy bears
 For branded props
 Advertise the nirvana
 Of finding the herd.

The Merchants of Cool
Snack on little children
Mmm-bop in their ears:
"Sing here in pulsing red"
 Hock instant cures
 For Loserdom
 So even Justin
 Gets the girl
 With endless legs
 And perpetual smile
 Of elusive It-ness.

The Merchants of Cool
Vomit little children
Wait for the next course:
"Time to change rules"
 Leave Johnny
 With a fistful
 Of five minutes ago
 To fall into
 The Gap.

A Venus and Serena Rising

JANET M. BANKS

With much attitude, standing alone
moving back and forth
checking out their opponents' fear,
strategizing and thinking fast about
when the next ball will fly,
their postures are fashioned with style
to smack the ball and make them stars.

The Teen Queens from Compton
creations of a father who
vowed to make them champions
are fluid with their serves,
power never seen
as balls fly
at 110 miles per hour.

The passion for the game
was transferred to them
from a father full of fire.
He taught them to stay
strong in adverse times,

to keep their heads up and their tennis rackets ready.

As young women with flowing braids
and beads swinging,
wearing sequined and studded uniforms,
watching them blow up
before our eyes,

Teen Terrors from Compton
Are like Althea Gibson revised and rising.

A Poet Romancing

JANET M. BANKS

On our fifth date
at his house for the first time
watching television,
I couldn't tell what was on.
The lights were dim,
it was warm inside,
I fell in love with his home and
his place would eventually be mine.
Poetry seeped out of every crevice with
newspaper articles and art on the wall;
little figurines evoked creation
to inspire and admire.
Coffee cups from all nighters were
on the table and his desk;
pens of distinction
with chewed up tops
which illustrate they were his—
a writer's thing.
I knew this was
the romance of a poet,
a word doctor,
speaking and writing in metaphors,
making love with his intellect
while pulling me into his world
of artistic passion.

September 11, 2001

*LAUREN TAKEMOTO
Honorable Mention*

In stillness ere the morning star does shine
Two eyes did open
He slides from bed, adjusts his tie
Coffee and crayon drawings tacked to his refrigerator
Ruffles his wife's hair and kisses her eyes

He stands upon the subway,
The railcar metal grinds to halt
He hears a distant echo,
A dark tunnel
Calling, calling
Like destiny, the voice calling
"Go back"

He wets his lips, only a gasp
Then rushes on,
Takes his place in cubicle number eleven
Unknowing
For the office so bright with life
A busy hive flowing

The man reaches
Strokes the curve of a silver picture frame
Remembers touch
His lips on her eyes
His son's first birthday

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Raw metal upon metal
The office hum, a symphony interrupted
Creaking, a blinding light
Then the hot sear
Burning and soot as the ceiling collapses
Screams, raw
Pain,
The dark tunnel

So the firemen said later
Digging amongst the rubble
A single charred photo
The face of a black haired woman and her son
In the ruins of cubicle number eleven

Next morning in darkness
Seeming like a blackened tunnel
Yet in sky above
Taking no notice to mankind's own slaughter
In stillness ere,
The morning star does shine

Elysian Fields

LAUREN TAKEMOTO

Sharp noise rang out and I did tremble
Stood then and found my body lifted up
I watched the red lights go by
Rain cleared, light falls soft upon my cheek
How strange I wonder
The stabbing pain
The pain that shot through my body a moment ago
It is no more

Then I see Alice running with her silver hair
She kneels and places a hand on someone's forehead
And I go to comfort her
But she does not see me
Still I wonder why trespassers are gathered round

I feel a hand upon my shoulder and turn
There is my father flushed and young
When last we met he was silver haired
Now golden strands brush his forehead
In pain no more, he smiles at me
Then I realize

The lights begin to whirl
I am four again
Tasting cotton candy on my tongue
The sugar dissolves
I clasp a pony on a merry-go-round
My father is watching me, and I wave

I sense warmth of a womb
A tiny heart beating
No, a single cell
The one
The beginning

I fear no more the pain that had shot through my body

I am joyful

Then I remember

I am sad to leave Alice alone

The sorrow, the late nights

But my father's voice is calling me

The insatiable quest is calling me

I come to realize

For I believed I had finished the last page to the book

Only the cover had been skimmed

I take my father's hand

I must leave you now dear reader, for the Elysian Fields

They await me

Mortal Truth

JESSICA AGARD

Entering into darkness
The cave of which I seek
And raising up my torch
Let out a terrified shriek

Before me lay a creature
With scales and horns and teeth
He snarled as I woke him
From out his tranquil sleep

Before I sprang to action
A glimmer I did spy
A gem of sapphire beauty
Much bluer than the sky

Cradled in its resting place
Beneath the dragon's wing
A lifetime's work of looting
Could not yield, what it should bring

The dragon leapt so quickly
His breath beneath my feet
I ran into a niche
Suitable for my retreat

Within the secure nook
I saw the creature's snout
Steady by my hiding place
Awaiting my coming out

Many hours passed before
My capture fell to sleep
Leaving the chance
At last for me to creep



But my greed again arose
As I passed the glistening stone
Lifting from the pedestal
I heard a vicious groan

As I turned around to see him
From the corner of my eye
There was no room for fleeing
Nothing left, but to die

So by that dragon's fiery breathe
I perished there that night
My mortal story told
I hope you heed it right

Learn lesson from experience
Greed will confuse the mind
Do not wake the dragon
Lest fate treat you in kind

Family Advice

*JESSICA AGARD
Poetry Award*

Mother said,
"People in glass houses shouldn't throw stones"
 Maybe they didn't know
When they flew winged boulders
 Into our front room
 And crashed the TV.
 Colliding for each of us
The room suffocated on silence.
 Our first instinct was
 To forget what Mother said.
 Hurl the stone back full force!
And the other voices in the room wondered,
 "Sticks and stones bruised our hearts, but
 What became of reason?"
 So our Father pleaded,
 "Turn the other cheek"
While Uncle Sam sharply commanded,
 "We cannot be made a mockery!"
 Grandfather Time admitted,
 "We have always fought before"
 I dared to say,
 "Shatter the glass,
before we are no more"

So Tight

MELLISA WASHBURN

The walk is limited
No where for them to sigh.

I stare in amazement,
as the Wranglers ride high.

I bend over in laughter as
you think twice about sitting.
Did you jump off your bed
to get those things fitting?

You leave in hopes of
picking Blondie up.
But what you don't realize
is you look like a schmuck.

My god your legs and package
have to be sweating.
By now your ass cheeks
are planning a wedding.

This look appears
to be uncool.
The problems you must
have when visiting the stool.

Universal Struggle

MELLISA WASHBURN

this *Conniving* power tiptoes
over brazen bone.
an *Antagonist* with a surfboard
hitting every loaded wave.
the message slaps you upside the head,
when positive means *Negative*.
time's schedule siphons minutes
from a *Corrupted* dream.
grinning like an *Evil*, sleepless, female dog
that craves for another piece of flesh.
the *Ridiculous* nightmare of life
here forever.

Round One: Customer vs. Waiter

MELLISA WASHBURN

Did Needy catch me on a good day?
Needy will never know, because the
smile is no where near genuine.
Water with a lemon easy Big Spender.
Drink order, food order, refill, refill,
No Thirsty I'm not in charge of how fast the food arrives.
Hungry came to lunch with a group of people,
but Whiny begs me to separate
the check and make it all equal.
No problem, no problem.
I'll do it with a fake smile,
as long as the pile of green grows higher.
As Content leaves I catch the eye,
Needy says thanks like all the smooth guys.
Tight Wad's out the door and I
check how much has been donated
to the table.
HOLD ON, WAIT A MINUTE!
WHINY MUST HAVE MISUNDERSTOOD!
There are no rich parents lending a hand.
Don't apologize Polite,
It's my job to understand.
Big Spender doesn't give a shit about me.
Content thinks I work here for fun.
Each one of them will be back,
and I'll be sure to warn all my buddies,
Customers constantly amaze me.



Silverside

Should I Be Your Teacher?

CRYSTAL A. MOORE

The feminist movement is one of interjecting a different view of women into the conscience of American society and the world. The movement proclaims basic rights that all women are entitled to such as equality in the work force and protection from sexual harassment. But beyond the surface, women of color are being left out of this movement; their voices are being silenced for reasons unknown. The same groups they turn to, to find their voice and to be heard from, are ignoring them. Why is this when the feminist movement is supposed to be for all women? And what happens when a woman of color is brought into the movement and expected to teach some white feminists about her culture? Some women of color are now questioning why they have become the teacher when these white feminists should be capable of going out and educating themselves. So, the question becomes do minority women have an obligation to educate these white women, or should white women become their own teachers and learn about another culture of women? And, why is there such resistance by white feminists to learning about minority women?

This question of who should be the teacher started with women of color turning to the feminist movement for support and a common interest. But instead they were turned away or left to feel alienated because their agenda did not fit the agenda of the white feminists. In the article "Asian Pacific American Women and Feminism," author Mitsuye Yamada talks about a get together she and other Asian Pacific American women had in San Francisco. One young woman spoke of her hope that by joining a women's group they would embrace her and her experiences, but instead she was turned away because her ideas did not fit what they were working for.

As I read that, I was somewhat surprised because I view myself as a feminist and had wanted to join some of those organizations. My surprise turned into disbelief as I read the first chapter in *Black Feminist*

Thought by Patricia Hill Collins. She states, "western feminisms have also suppressed Black women's ideas" (Collins 5). She goes on to state, "even though Black women intellectuals have long expressed a distinctive African-influenced and feminist sensibility about how race and class intersect in structuring gender, historically we have not been full participants in White feminist organizations" (Collins 5).

I felt disillusioned like the young woman Mitsuye Yamada spoke of in her article. I had embraced these white feminist ideas as my own, never questioning if they truly applied to me. Equal treatment in the work force sounds like it applies to me, sexual harassment applies to me, and the right to control what I do with my body applies to me, so why are women who are my race and other races not included in the fight for women's rights?

The answer might be found in the writings of minority women and what they say about white feminist women. Jo Carrillo wrote a powerful poem called "And When You Leave, Take Your Pictures With You," saying white radical women have an idea of minority women from pictures they see. These pictures portray women of color as illiterate, working in the hot sun for a small wage and holding small children that will suffer the same fate. Carrillo writes when a white radical woman meets a woman of color in person, she is not as pleased to meet her because she does not resemble her picture; "We're not as happy as we look on their wall." (39-42).

Carrillo is essentially saying that even white feminists have a certain view of minority women; so when they meet one face to face, they see we are not as pleased with our situations as they were led to believe. This might be the problem for a lot of white feminists out there who have ignored their minority sisters; they have never been willing to step out of their comfort zone to see how the other half lives.



Another problem might be that the white feminist does not see or does not want to see just how good she has it. Admitting that she has certain privileges that other women do not have would possibly give way to criticism from men saying "then what are you complaining about!" The white feminists might view minority feminists as a threat to what they are trying to achieve. Minority feminists don't have just gender to discuss and deal with, but also race. When those two elements are included in the white feminist agenda, then they are forced to deal with their own views of race and what they believe.

Then comes the question of who should be responsible for teaching these white feminists about race and what minority feminists go through everyday.

Some of the best teachers are people who have lived through the situation, people who know first hand what it was like. Speaking with someone who fought in the Vietnam War is a far better teacher than reading about it in a textbook; personal accounts are easier to identify with. If a woman of color speaks to a room full of white feminists and tells them of her experiences and how they make her feel, then she is teaching them something about her. The question is: should this woman of color be their only teacher and spokesperson for her race, or should the white feminist want to learn more and seek out other women of color to educate her? In my heart, I do not believe a woman of color minds being a teacher; the problem comes when she is the only teacher. Responsibility lies with the white feminists searching for other women of color to begin their understanding of them. I was put in a situation my freshman year of college, here at Avila, of playing the teacher for my race. I was expected to teach my class about African philosophy, something I was just as clueless about as my white counterparts. I let my teacher know in a friendly way that I went through the same educational system as those in the room, and



I would be of no help. I can't say that was my first experience playing teacher because frankly I can't remember if I have before. From where I stand now, I know it won't be the last. I have no problem enlightening someone on my race if they have a question, but, again, the problem begins when I assume the position of spokesperson for the black race, without having been elected.

In terms of the resistance to incorporating women of color into the feminist movement, I can only shake my head in sadness and disbelief. My feelings about the movement haven't changed; I still believe in equal rights for all women. I just wish the movement believed the same thing. To leave one's own comfort zone is a hard task to do, but once we have, many wonderful life-changing experiences can begin to happen.

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'Cause This is Thriller

CHRISTINA KIRK

On July 6, 1984, Michael Jackson kicked off his Victory Tour in Kansas City at Arrowhead Stadium. As he moonwalked across the stage before a sold-out crowd of screaming fans, a nine-year-old girl in a dusty panhandle Texas town cried herself to sleep.

Eighteen years have passed since I missed that concert and as many since I set foot in Texas. That summer, Michael Jackson was riding the peak of his popularity following the 1982 release of his album *Thriller*. He was also my idol. On a boring, sweltering day, only a few weeks into a three-month visit with my dad, my mother called with her own thriller -- four seats in the tenth row on the stadium floor. I never made it there. When my dad refused to let me go, my sister attended in my place. My only memory is a t-shirt from the concert, a bitter consolation that my mom now uses for dusting. Who knows where my old LP is, or my dad for that matter. Admittedly Michael Jackson no longer looks like, well, the Michael Jackson I once loved. Even so, *Thriller* maintains a special spot in my CD collection. And for good reason -- it is one of the best albums of the 20th century.

That there is even a term "one-hit wonder" speaks to the impermanence of pop music. Since *Thriller*'s release, no other Jackson album has enjoyed similar popular and critical success. His most recent offering has sold comparatively few copies and received lackluster reviews. And since *Thriller*'s release, rumors, scandals, and botched plastic surgeries have overshadowed the magic and hype he once generated. The phenomenon of *Thriller* nonetheless merits discussion, one isolated from controversy and on the basis of the album's success, both popular and critical, and its influence on pop music.

If popularity equals album sales, then *Thriller* is rightly the most popular album of all time. Worldwide, over 50 million copies have been sold since its release in December 1982, an achievement noted in the

Guinness Book of World Records ("Achievements"). The Recording Industry Association of America also certified it a platinum album (an album that has sold one million copies) for the twenty-sixth time in 1999 ("History 2000s"). When the album reached number one on the charts, it remained there for thirty-seven consecutive weeks, buoyed by several hit songs ("History 1980s"). Of the nine songs on the album, seven were Top Ten hits, two of which, "Beat It" and "Billie Jean," were also certified platinum ("History 1980s"). Fans spoke of his popularity in other ways, naming him the #1 Artist of the Year in *Rolling Stone's* 1983 Readers' Poll and the Best All-Around Entertainer of the Year in 1984 at the People's Choice Awards ("Achievements"). Additional fan support litters the Internet, a testament to the longevity of the album's popularity. A Google Search on Michael Jackson spits back nearly 2 million hits, hits that include current fan reviews and personal tributes to the Gloved One. Hundreds have reviewed *Thriller* at Amazon.Com where they declare, "Thriller is as thrilling now as it was originally" and "This album represents history, not just for the 80s, but for the 21st century." Speaking with dollars and words, fans were and are thrilled.

The album's popular success was far-reaching, spawning unprecedented album sales as well as video sales. The fourteen-minute video of the title song premiered on MTV and quickly found fan support. After it was released in theaters, a video entitled "The Making of Michael Jackson's Thriller" soon followed, a marketing phenomenon that sold millions and remains the best-selling home video of all time ("History 1980s"). And if fans' money did not speak loudly enough, their votes for the *Thriller* video did, resulting in MTV Viewers Choice and People's Choice Awards for Favorite Video in 1984 ("Achievements"). In his song "P.Y.T.," Michael Jackson pleaded, "Let me take you to the max." His listeners had clearly answered in kind.

While fans made Jackson a superstar, critics recognized him as an artist. In January 1984, Jackson received eight American Music Awards ("History 1980s"). A few months later, he was nominated for twelve Grammy Awards and went on to win eight of them, a record that remains undefeated ("History 1980s"). Jackson's artistry was celebrated in numerous reviews as well. Christopher Connelly of *Rolling Stone Magazine* declared of *Thriller*: "Jackson has cooked up a zesty LP whose uptempo workouts don't obscure its harrowing, dark messages." Indeed, his messages ranged from declaring independence on "Wanna Be Startin' Something" to emphatically denying paternity on "Billie Jean" to screaming the horrors of celebrity in the title song. Jackson's voice, however, was his greatest strength, prompting Connelly to conclude, "Where lesser artists need a string section or a lusty blast from a synthesizer, Jackson need only sing to convey deep, heartfelt emotion." The *New York Times* echoed the sentiment, asserting, "that voice, which he mixes with all manner of falsetto effects, is the greatest example of this sort of erotic keening since the heyday of Smokey Robinson" (Rockwell H25). Such critical support landed the album on the seventh spot of *Rolling Stone's* Top 100 Albums of the 1980s. Where it concerned Michael Jackson, critics and fans agreed -- he was good.

The critical success of *Thriller* has extended far beyond its release twenty years ago. When *Thriller* was re-released in 1999, MTV's website gushed that it is "the finest example of perfect disco pop, and a record that should be prescribed to musical snobs and manic depressives. The album is a true ambassador of what pop music can be." And as we closed out the previous century -- reflected on what was good and what was best left behind -- *Thriller* landed on several "top" lists, including Virgin Records Top 50 Albums of the Century and MTV's 100 Greatest Albums. Individual songs were memorialized also with "Billie Jean" and "Beat It" making



Rolling Stones' Top 100 Pop Songs of the Century alongside such musical greats as the Beatles and Bob Dylan. VH1 joined the bandwagon and honored Jackson in its 100 Greatest Videos of All Time, ranking the videos for "Thriller," "Beat It," and "Billie Jean" first, twenty-first, and thirty-fourth respectively. The phenomenon that was *Thriller* transcended album sales and critical reception, however -- it changed pop music itself.

Michael Jackson made it possible for others to be stars. Many artists, some just toddlers when *Thriller* was released, cite Jackson as their inspiration. Ask about their role models, and today's stars will point in his direction:

Britney Spears gushes about him as a major influence. Destiny's Child mimics his moves in their most recent video. Rock group Alien Ant Farm has a breakthrough hit with its cover of Jackson's '80s hit "Smooth Criminal," with a hilarious video that pays tribute to him. Even 'N Sync borrows from Jackson's style on their latest album (Moody). Rhythm, dance, lyrics -- *Thriller* set new standards for pop music, standards from which a new generation of stars derives its success. Even making fun of *Thriller* launched careers, as Weird Al Yankovic did with a parody of a Jackson hit song, transforming the tough guys of "Beat It" into the jiggling overeaters of "Eat It." Whether in reverence or in jest, other pop artists inherited the legacy of Michael Jackson.

As pop's new aristocrats rule the charts, it's hard to imagine that Jackson was once king. It's even harder to imagine a time when MTV didn't exist. Although MTV hit the airwaves over a year before *Thriller* did, it was Michael Jackson who changed the face of music videos, an influence that is the most important legacy of the album. *Flak Magazine* argued, "Michael Jackson's impact on the art of the music video is as indisputable as his impact on the art of popular music" (Weitner). Both as

a song and a video, "Billie Jean" was a phenomenon, "play[ing] a pivotal role in breaking the early color barrier at MTV, knocking down walls so that other black artists could get a shot on the fledgling video channel" ("Pop 100"). It was, in fact, the first video by a black artist ever to air on MTV. Jackson's videos were innovative in other ways as well. How they were made and how they were viewed were equally important. Videos were not just opportunities to hear and see our favorite singers. Neither did they simply rehash songs; they provided new and visual interpretations of them. Specifically, Jackson's videos "changed the landscape of the music video, cementing in viewers' minds the potential of videos to be both short films and major media events" (Weitner). Indeed, the video for "Thriller" at fourteen minutes long, was both a mini-film and a media event. Following a boy's transformation into a werewolf then a zombie, it "broke new ground because of its length and the quality and ambition of its special effects" ("Fatboy"). It also became a media event when, after MTV declined to air it, "Jackson threatened to cause a boycott of the channel by his label Epic" ("MTV's Irresistible Rise"). When the controversy died and MTV finally aired the video, it was clear that video had changed pop music: Jackson's album began selling at a rate of 800,000 per week afterwards ("MTV's Irresistible Rise"). Videos became irreversibly linked to pop music, providing deeper meaning of the music and a new vehicle for stars to market themselves. The first video ever to air on MTV was "Video Killed the Radio Star," a song that lamented the intrusion of technology on music. Jackson exploited it in new ways, however, and became both a radio and video star.

Mention *Thriller* and everyone, whether artist or fan, has a story to tell. Mine has been told many times, because it is, like Jackson's album, a defining moment in history. Each time I weave my tale, the disappointment of missing his concert grows more faint and less painful. I need only to

slide that album into the CD player of my car to recapture the magic that was *Thriller*. That I listen to it as an adult has less to do with nostalgia and more to do with the album's greatness. The world -- the larger one and my own -- really did change when it hit the airwaves. It forever changed the way we defined success and forever changed the way we watched videos. Flip on the radio or TV, and you'll likely run into this legacy from the 20th century. As the Gloved One warned on the title song, "There's no escapin'."

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Chapter 33

SYBIL PARIS NOBLE

My legs are so stiff -- I can't stand it! If I could just move a little, but I can't, the cuffs are too tight. I put up a fight but they just shut the side room door and called a "Code A." They opened up the door and rushed me (restraints and needle in hand). I know it's either Haldol or Thorazine -- I can tell by the feeling -- I hate the drugged up feeling almost as much as I hate laying here alone listening to the people yelling in the rooms next to me, and listening to "them," the voices. I guess they had to restrain me; I was head banging. One of the ways I try to get the voices to go away. I had sat on the hard tile floor and hit my head over and over. I feel it now, and I am beginning to drift into a deep, drugged sleep.

I hate all of this -- the hospital, the voices, the drugs, and the cycle. I remember before -- I was thin and I played sports.

When the voices began, I was 10. I remember the instance. Sitting on the living room floor while my mom sat and read, listening to Crosby, Stills and Nash.

"...house is a very, very, very fine house. With two..."

"WHAT?"

(It was a direct question of me. I kind of looked around, not knowing whom I was expecting to see. Who could possibly have snuck past the door and...)

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"...cats in the yard. Life used to be so haaaaard. Now..."

"WHAT?"

(I looked around again. What about "what?" But there was only my mother and me. Was it dubbed? Was this a joke? Now I was getting angry, confused, upset.)

"...everything is easy 'cause of you."

"WHAT IS YOUR PROBLEM?"

(It was as if the voice was inside of me, in my head. The voice was mean, nasty sounding, vile.)



"Mom, did you hear that?"

"Hear what, honey?"

"Never mind."

(Suspicions confirmed. It was a secret meant just for me -- and I kept it that way.)

When I became a sophomore in High School, it began to get really bad. All of a sudden they weren't just an occasional whisper; they were tormenting me and shouting, "YOU BITCH, EVERYONE HATES YOU, AND YOU'RE GOING TO HELL. YOU'RE GOING TO DIE. YOU'RE CRAZY!" I began to get very frightened. I called crisis hotline, thought of suicide, began to drink, and do drugs. The ironic thing is I thought that everyone (all of my friends and all teens) were going through the same thing. I thought that this was why it was so hard to be a teen! I was just living the "terrible teens." Didn't everyone go through stuff like this?

"Sybil, ya ready to come out of restraints?" It's the psych tech.

"Yeah, I'm OK."

I squint from the fluorescent lights in the hallway as I slowly make my way down to the Day Room.

They put a hospital tray in front of me. "You put up a good fight," one of the patients says, as he rocks methodically in front of the TV, mumbling and laughing to himself. I eat cold lasagna and drink a half carton of milk without ever tasting the food. I have no feeling, no sensation other than a feeling of numbness, stiffness and blurriness (a combination of restraints and meds).

I remember being admitted. Sitting there, people going off all around me, and then THE question...

"Sybil, why does a rolling stone gather no moss?" They look at me.

"Sybil, do you understand the question?"



"No, not really."

I have NEVER understood the question. It really doesn't matter. The floor was merging with the table which, by then, had absorbed my hands almost an hour earlier (and they're worried about moss). I was a part of EVERYTHING. My boundaries were endless.

I could hear bits and pieces of everyone's conversations: "...she didn't even go to...I think they might put that one back up on 2...if they had given her more meds when she...it's just how we have to do it now...to calm her down so...a lesson and we...have you eaten, I just...God, not again, I get so...have you eaten anything...Sybil...Sybil?"

"Uh, no."

"Here baby, here's a sandwich from the cafeteria and we should be able to get you up on a floor in a couple of hours...try to relax."

I have no idea how long I waited two, five, six...hours, all night? I remember walking up to the floor. I melted with the wall the whole way. Time was disjointed; I was dissociated (from the reality, which was going on around me but didn't feel "real").

In the Day Room as things came into focus I looked around. There were two couches, one TV, two telephones (with three people waiting to use the free one), two end tables, one desk, (behind which sat a psych tech reading the paper and charting an occasional note on a client). There were five round tables (four with four chairs each and one with three chairs) -- this is where the people who were restricted to the unit ate, and this is where visitors came to visit with their family members or friends who were in the hospital.

I hear a voice behind me

"Sybil, you're crazy girl."

It's my friend Gail; she has been in the hospital for three and a half months and is doing pretty well.



"What they gotcha on?"

"I dunno, Haldol, Thorazine and Depakote...I think."

All of a sudden I hear it..."YOU BITCH! YOU'RE GOING TO HELL!
YOU UGLY, NO GOOD..."

And I am drifting; I can no longer concentrate on the room or Gail.

I am walking down the hallway running my hand along the wall
and shuffling in my "hospital issue" slippers (that have exposed two of the
toes on my left foot).

"YOUR MOTHER'S DEAD...YOU KILLED JERRY."

Now I'm really getting scared. Jerry is my husband and I haven't
seen him since I came up to the floor from the Screening Clinic. I worry
about Jerry, about my mom, about...I yell at the nurse.

"I didn't mean to hurt Jerry, I didn't..."

I begin to cry. My sorrow runs deep. It has built up over time.

The nurse opens up the medication room door and yells out
"meds." Obediently I get in line behind five other patients. When I'm
almost to the front, the guy in front of me "goes off" and grabs a girl. The
nurse shuts the med room window and calls a Code A. As we are all
shuttled to the back in the Day Room, I see the psych techs and staff from
other floors begin to file onto the locked unit, and they take the guy down
and put him in a side room. They give him a shot as he curses them with
some choice phrases.

I get a white cup with six pills and tell the nurse, "I don't usually
take this gray pill, what is it?"

"Oh, the Doctor is just switching your meds around don't worry
about it -- he wants you to take it."

She gives me a small white cup with some orange juice and I
swallow all the pills. (I've become an expert over the years). I reach over
the med room door and toss the cup in the trash.



"Good shot. Bank shot, two points," Alex says.

Alex was on a full basketball scholarship to KU when he got sick. He's been in the system for over twenty years. He is almost 7 feet tall, walks with a stoop and has a beer belly. He lives on Social Security in a Section 8 (low income) apartment in mid-town. It's sad -- he refuses to play basketball -- too many memories. My friends on the outside have been talking and he's probably headed for a boarding home. It'll kill him if he loses his apartment...

I'm trying to avoid "the voices" and quit worrying about everything and about twenty minutes later begin to fade. I go to my room. A room with ceramic tiles on the floor, four small square light green tiles and one long rectangular lime green one, surrounding a large white tile with speckles. They are the same colors and designs that make up the floor and moldings near the floor of the seclusion rooms (I have studied them closely many times). Only the color scheme changes occasionally. In my room there are four metal bed frames bolted to the cement floor beneath the tiles. I sit on the side of my lumpy bed and notice that visitors from long ago have scratched messages. The one that attracts my attention says, "help me." I look into my distorted reflection in the metallic mirror on the wall (there is no glass allowed). So in a place where your senses are distorted, you are made to look into a mirror that belongs in a sideshow -- making you look strange and surreal.

I take my lumpy state issue pillow and thin blue blanket and keep on my slippers with holes and fall asleep.

I awake in the middle of the night to voices loud and strong.

"YOU'RE GOING TO DIE!" And then they go on,

"THE END OF THE WORLD IS AT HAND."



I think sadly of all the time I have spent over the years. In hospitals, in programs, listening to voices and being afraid, and all the pills I have taken to try to be normal and lead a normal life, and I think about how all of this has been time: wasted.

I walk back to the empty Day Room and stand by the window and look out at the rain coming down over the city. I look through the quarter inch, heavy, dusty, thick steel mesh screen (made so I can't jump) and I think:

"Is this it, is this what my life is?"

I look out the screen at the lights of the City.



short stories

Jolene the Journalist and The Boy Band

CRYSTAL A. MOORE

The Concert

Throughout my career, I have met the wildest bands, kookiest musicians and the "I made them" managers that are the biggest pains in my ass. It's not that the guys (and gals) in these bands gave a hoot what I said about them, but that I was saying something about them. Most of the bands I have been forced to say something decent about are the "I want to be a rock star so I can get free drugs and girls." Real winners...really! That's why I was somewhat refreshed and skeptical when my editors told me to do a cover story on a popular boy band. They thought it would be good for the magazine to do a hip and happening story and, if anyone could get the real deal on these guys, then it would be me. I say it's because there are no real rock stars anymore, so they have to settle with the kiddie stars, and I'm the only real journalist who they could have conned into doing it.

Let it be known now that, once upon a teenage life, I was a fan of the pop generated music world. I was one of those screaming girls who got a kick out of seeing my dream guy on the cover of Bop and its sister mag Big Bopper. Back then my objects of hyperventilation were the New Kids on the Block; yes, you pre-pubescent girls out there; I only had one group to love. Now here I am again at age 24, and I'm standing in line waiting for the gates of heaven to open up. As I look around, I wonder to myself, if an alien came down right now, would he be able to tell me apart from the giggling specimens in halter-tops with only 13 years to their faces. Well maybe so, I mean I am the only one who isn't giggling.

It seems like I've been standing here for ages; I should have used my member of the press power and gone into the arena. But what fun would that be when I can stand here and freeze to death. It's amazing the amount of flesh being shown here tonight. This dangerous amount might

tempt some spirit into borrowing a couple of pounds and to rejoin the seeing world. I don't know how they manage to wear such little clothing and still remain a decent coloring. As I looked around, there was a sea of pre-teens in red and black halter-tops showing off their surprisingly flat tummies. Note to self: find the name of their personal trainers. Streaks of glitter colored their blonde ponytails. Butterfly barrettes fluttered to keep the dark unruly bangs in place. Makeup was minimal on the older girls, but a few did look like Tammy Faye Baker on a good day. Names of the group members were painted on cheeks, arms, and stomachs. Signs expressing love and lust ran rampant throughout this all-girl crowd. Fathers looked sedated as they stared straight ahead so as not to look at the gorgeous jailbait around them. Mothers talked to one another, probably reminiscing about their days of drooling over Leif Garrett and Donny Osmond.

A storm of screams arose in the air as the doors swung nonchalantly open. "Finally" I said to myself feeling a little excited to see what all the fuss was about. I gave the older woman my ticket,

"You know you could have gone around back and showed them your pass." she told me.

"Yes, I know," I said.

As I made my way into the arena, the smell of adrenaline and popcorn filled the air. Groups of girls were still giggling as they made their way around the arena to find their \$50 seats. I struggled my way through the crowd, only to be stopped by the merchandise stand. T-shirts with the guys' serious faces stared back at me; what pretty boys they are. Half-naked posters of the group hung on the wall; muscle shots, laughing shots, poses and the "yeah I'm the most popular guy of the group" single shots. I had to laugh quietly to myself when the last poster of the cute one was sold and the lucky girl who bought it had to fight off the others. "Bitch," I heard one of them say. Vicious pre-teens, I tell you, vicious.



I followed the herd until I found my section 115, row f, seat 5; you would think being an upstanding member of the press that I'd have a better seat, but no such luck. Oh well, maybe the bad boy of the group will see me up here, fall madly in love, and I'll become his wife; heck, he is my age. I sat down next to two girls who were discussing the fine art of flirting with a bodyguard to get backstage.

"Maybe if I show him some leg, he'll let me backstage," said a petite brunette with breasts bigger than mine.

"Yeah right Angie, you'll have to do a lot more than that to get backstage," said her glitter-streaked friend.

"Like what?" said the future playboy playmate.

"Angie, think about it, all guys want is sex. So to get backstage you'll probably have to give him a...you know," replied glitter.

"Gross, I'd never do that."

"Not even to get backstage?"

"No, never."

Well maybe I was wrong about the playmate thing.

It was one minute till showtime and I was feeling, dare I say, nauseated. Okay, to be fair, I was a little excited, but it's hard not to be with the scent of youth in the air. The scent of adolescent admiration, love and lust. I didn't know much about these guys, but I was interested in what they had to offer.

As the lights dimmed, the screams rose, letting everyone know in a 10-mile radius that their men were about to take the stage. The arena went dark and an array of green and yellow glow sticks wiggled to the movements of the girls. Thunderous music filled the arena, accompanied by a voice telling the audience that only a few are chosen on earth to do a special duty, and that these five guys are the chosen ones. "Oh brother," I say to myself, "this gets cornier and cornier". Lights flash on each guy as

the voice said the names of these young, strapping bucks. Shrieks of giggles and downright hysterical fits are witnessed as the curtain drops and live, in person are these men ruling the pop world. A familiar tune spreads through the arena like a virus, and I find myself singing along. Hey, what can you expect? I still listen to pop radio. The different personalities of the guys come through loud and clear. The cute one is wearing a sleeveless shirt with 'hunk' written on it. Hmm mental note: possibly caught up in his own hype. The jock is also sporting a sleeveless shirt showing off his well-defined biceps and awesome looking triceps. Mental note again: possible date. The silly one looks a little different from the poster I saw out front; maybe he got voted to the "outdated-antics-that-aren't-so-funny" status. The brain of the group looks a tad bit on the out of place side; he'll be a real estate agent in 3 years. The last guy of the group has pink hair...pink hair? Definitely something that needs exploring by a seasoned journalist like myself.

The show moves at a fast pace with the group singing back to back, only stopping to do some rehearsed talk to the audience. These girls are devouring every word spoken by these overly processed hunks. They sing a love song I swear I've heard before, but I manage to contain myself when they point at various girls in the audience and sing to them. Gosh, why don't I have floor seats? I want to be sung to.

After about 10 million costume changes, and 7 songs already under their belt, the guys finally say goodnight to their love-struck fans. They thank the crowd for being so supportive and added that, if it weren't for the fans, they wouldn't be able to do what they are doing. Uncontrollable fits of screaming again skipped in the air, only this time it's to bring the boys back out. And after what seemed like an eternity, the good soldiers obeyed the rules of pop stardom and came back for an encore. A familiar tune exploded into the arena, followed by an amazingly in tune chorus



coming from my side of this experience. The boys wiggled their lackluster behinds, broke into a rap that was highly amusing, and ended their hour and a half show with a blast of pyrotechnics.

It was over: the waiting game outside, the almost too mature conversation next to me, and finally the five bubblegum guys that had danced to the tunes of their own music. I sat in my seat for a while watching the crew clear away chairs and dismantle a stage they would only have to put back up in a few hours. I watched the faces of the young girls for disappointment, but I only found excitement and even more giggles if that's possible. I sat while I reflected on my days as a star struck teenager and realized I actually paid money for a show like this.

I got up from my seat and walked to a guard at the bottom of my section. I showed him my badge and asked him where I should go. He pointed to a short guy with an Armani suit on and a cell phone attached to his ear. I walked over to him, knowing who he was; an uptight agent who didn't know the world was revolving around the group and not him. I flashed him my badge and said I was here to interview the guys for the magazine. He shook his head and continued to talk on his phone for a few seconds longer. "Got to go hon, Jolene's here," the uptight tight ass said. He shut his phone off and asked me to follow him. I walked behind the stage, now being caught up in the urgency to get things done. I was going to meet these guys that have the world by their puppet strings. I will admit that I was nervous, but adrenaline pumped through my veins as I was now approaching a universe we call pop stardom.



Amagansett

Defiant Women: Monologues on Body Image

CRYSTAL A. MOORE

The Trouble with Shopping

(Scene opens with four clothes racks to the right of the stage, and a dressing room to the left. Two girls enter on the right and proceed to shop)

Kate

I don't know why we came here. I never find anything that fits.

{Kate shuffles through
the rack}

Natalie

Oh, come on, it's not that bad. Look at this, this could fit you; it's a medium.

{Natalie holds up a shirt}

Kate

Yeah, I'll bet, a medium for a girl who is a size 2 as opposed to a size 8.

Natalie

Don't be so cynical. So what if there are girls that are a size 2, it doesn't make them better than us. At least we look like women.

Kate

I don't disagree, but they should have sizes that fit all women instead of stores only carrying sizes from a 4 all the way down to a zero. Ah, lookie here, a size 12 in flared style jeans. That's a rarity in this place.

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{Kate picks up a pair of
jeans}

Natalie

Go try them on to make sure they fit, and to see if you like them.

Kate

Yeah, I think I will, just in case.

{Kate goes into the
dressing room and tries
them on}

play

Kate

Damn it to hell!

{Natalie comes over to the room}

Natalie

What? What's wrong?

{Kate whispers}

Kate

The jeans don't fit. Either I've gained some weight, or a size 12 translates into a size 8. Damn it; you know, it's stuff like this that causes women to diet. Hell, I've dieted when I couldn't fit into a certain sweater. Well, not anymore, from this moment on I declare NO MORE DIETS! And no more going to stores that cater to this look

{Natalie still looks at the clothes on the rack}

Natalie

Ya' know, I was watching some news program, Primetime Live or 20/20, something like that. Anyway, they were interviewing that model Carrie Otis; she's considered a plus size model and she's only a size 12. Can you believe that! She was thinner than I am; I mean, she looked healthy and all, but still. We are plus size! Isn't that crazy?

—
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Kate

It's a conspiracy I tell you, and sometimes we women are too blind to see it. I say NO MORE SIZE ZEROS!

Natalie

Yeah, NO MORE SIZE ZEROS!

{They both yell it as they leave the store}



Angry 2

ANNIE

Don't ask if I have an eating disorder.
I don't have bulimia or anorexia.
I eat fast food like McDonald's and Taco Bell, and
enjoy every minute of it.
Yes, I am a size 2,
but that does not mean I am sick.
Don't look at me with pity and disgust,
I am not the enemy.
Can I go into a store and find clothes that will fit?
Yes, but that does not mean I have the perfect body.
Don't come up to me and hand me cookies and donuts.
If I wanted a donut, I'd go to Krispy Kremes.
How would you feel if I came up to you while you were eating and said,
"I'd have the salad if I were you."
Don't blame me if your boyfriend calls you fat,
because I've had boyfriends tell me I was too thin.
Don't come up and say I have the perfect life because I am thin.
I've been called ugly and unfeminine.
Boy-like, weak, breakable, weight-obsessed, conceited and dumb.
I am none of the above. I am a smart, funny, caring, strong, educated
woman who happens to be a size 2.
Next time you want to offer me dinner, offer me a conversation instead.

My Husband Would Walk Behind

SYLVIE

My husband walks behind me so not to let anyone see that I am his wife. He thinks I haven't noticed that he's been slipping further and further away from me when we go out. He believes I don't know that he hates the way I waddle back and forth when I move. He thinks I don't know that he's looking at other women wishing he were with them instead of me; especially Michelle at the checkout counter. I know he thinks I'm fat and ugly and thinks I should go on a diet. He doesn't understand why I won't take him up on his offer for a full body liposuction. Yeah, like I'm going to let some doctor who took a weekend course in plastic surgeries perform it on me. Sure I have a little cellulite, but it never hurt anyone. My breasts don't stand up and tell him hello when he walks through the door. So what. I gave him three beautiful children who run into his arms when he comes home. That should at least count for something.

My husband doesn't think I'm very bright; he never has. He used to tell me, "Sylvie, I didn't marry you for your brains." Boy, he is stupid. He doesn't know that my waddle through this grocery store is actually my hips switching back and forth to impress the young twenty-something stock boy who just last week told me I was beautiful and sexy. My husband would love to know that Michelle, the checkout girl, only flirts back to him because she likes a good laugh every once in a while. She says it's good to flirt with a man who looks that old. If only my husband would walk beside me, instead of behind, he'd see a whole different view.



Food Kills

KIRSTEN

I'm not in denial, so don't think that I am. The doctors keep saying I have anorexia, but I disagree. I'm fine; I just prefer to be thin. So what that I like the feelings of hunger pains when my stomach pleads for food. That shows I have will power. How many of you can say the same thing? What's the big deal anyway; I'm not hurting anyone. It's not like I'm killing people, doing drugs, or robbing a bank. I just refuse to eat; unless I'm on the verge of blacking out, then I'll eat a small, small, salad.

Don't ask me how I started, because I can't remember. I've always felt food was out to destroy me. Sure, I eat sometimes, but like I said above, I only do it before I black out. I passed out twice before and that lead me to the psychologist. Quack, he thinks because he's an expert on "eating disorders" that he can cure me. Little does he know that I'm too far gone for help. Besides, I don't need help; I'm fine just the way I am.

Some of my friends and I play a game: who can see what bone first. It's a test to see who has the guts to go through with it. That's how you know someone is a true ana, if they are willing to go the extra mile to thinness. Some girls out there claim to be anorexics for attention, or to lose five pounds, and then they go back to eating themselves fat. Not us, we realize that what we are doing is important. We are standing up for the thousands of girls out there who are ashamed to be thin because parents and doctors tell them they are sick. What's wrong in accepting that some of us don't want to get fat and are taking precautions against it? You can't make us eat, no matter how hard you try. I had a friend die two weeks ago: Ellie. She had just turned 21 and was "on the road to recovery." Little did she know the food she had resisted for so long would kill her. The doctors said her heart gave out because of all the stress she put on it, but we true Anas know what happened: Food killed our friend.

What It's Like

You don't know what it's like to be me. To get into modeling just to prove to yourself that you are beautiful. Always having in the back of your mind that you are a role model.

You don't know what it's like being black and a model. Having to work twice as hard for the paycheck and when you do, being told you're too dark, or light, but not light enough.

You don't know what it's like having to battle with your hair: straight, curly, kinky, to have extensions, or not have extensions. Do we want long and flowing or short and nappy; to perm or to leave natural. Will I look "too" black with an Afro, or "too" white with it long? Will young black girls see themselves in my image or what they think they should be?

You don't know what it's like to be me. To be rejected for looking too ethnic to appear in an "All-American" ad. To be told I'm too dark to be beautiful. I'll reach my target audience if I go to black oriented magazines. No one in middle America wants to see my face. You don't know what it's like to never see your face in a magazine. To feel like you don't exist in a world that's called beautiful. Just because you don't have hair that sways in the wind, or eyes so clear you can see the soul. You just don't know what it's like to be me.

Big and Proud

LISA

I'm a big woman, and I admit it. I'm also proud to say I come from a race of people that prides itself on embracing its big women. Sure, I can go to the big girls' stores and find clothes that make me look sexy and elegant. Oprah and Star Jones are role models for us big girls, but just because we have Oprah doesn't mean we don't feel the pressure to lose our weight. Hell, I used Oprah as an example, but even Oprah has fallen to the pressure a time or two. Us big girls have pressure from doctors saying we should lose weight because of high blood pressure, cholesterol, and diabetes. Why do they say lose weight? Like being skinny will prevent us from dying. Those doctors should say exercise for health; get healthy. Now, I have no problem with that, but the minute someone says lose weight, I close my ears. What's with being skinny anyway? It's not beautiful to see bones. Look at those old paintings hanging up in those museums; they're big. Big and womanly, just how God created us. I'm not following that crap about being thin. Don't get me wrong, I know there are some women out there that are naturally thin; that's great, embrace yourself, just don't shove that thin stuff down my throat. Give me my fatty food favorites, but you can also give me a salad, and some grilled chicken and veggies. I'm not opposed to eating healthy, just opposed to being told to go down to sizes my body was not meant to be. I'm proud to be a big girl and no one will take that away.

I'm Tired

SUSAN

I'm tired of being stared at like I'm disgusting.

I'm tired of being told to join Weight Watchers and Jenny Craig.

I'm tired of the laughs I hear when I walk by you.

I'm tired of being looked at like I'm out of control when I sit down in a restaurant and order my favorite dish.

I'm tired of the small cramped seats in movie theaters, so I have to sit in handicapped seats even when I am able bodied.

I'm tired of being ignored. Having mothers tell their children not to stare and never bothering to look my way.

I'm tired of the fat jokes that pass through your vain lips.

I'm tired of you not teaching your children that there is nothing freakish about a clinically obese woman.

I'm tired of justifying what I eat.

I'm tired of being thought of as too stupid to stop eating.

I'm tired of being told I'm not beautiful.

I'm tired of being called dumb.

I'm just plain tired.

I Am Not A Man

Just because I exercise does not mean I am a man. I lift weights sure, but does that mean I am a man? I like being a strong muscular woman. I don't use steroids, if that's what you're thinking when you look at me; women can get this large. I've been called a lesbian, a dyke, a man, and a freak of nature. Never have I been called womanly, powerful, beautiful, and goddess-like. Don't let my muscles fool ya'; I'm all woman. I love Winnie-the-Pooh, diamond earrings, and I get my nails done every two weeks. I love dressing up for dates, putting on make-up, and stuffed animals. I like to be wined and dined, but if you try anything funny, I'll throw you across the room.

I stand next to you in the gym, when you give me looks of repulsion. Wondering why I would want to look like this. I say to you, "Why wouldn't I want to look this way?" Did you notice the mountains and valleys running up and down my arms? This stomach took me a year to look this svelte. I am a living goddess who can stand next to the great gods of the universe. Did you notice my long auburn hair, or my Gucci stilettos in the locker room? I have a date with a heart surgeon after this workout session.

I started working out later in life when I realized I was not going to be a petite, small woman. I noticed my body was built more like Adonis than Aphrodite. But in an effort to redefine Aphrodite, and make her not only a sexual being, but a physical one too. I kind of envisioned her walking out of the ocean, with all her sex appeal glowing behind her, and her body rippling with well-defined muscles. That was my dream for some of the sculptures of her. Oh, well, maybe in a parallel universe. Maybe in that universe, women who look like me are not called men. Women who are strong are thought to be beautiful, warrior like. Remember just because I have a muscular frame doesn't mean I can't be a winner, a champion, your lover, and your friend. I cry when my heart has been broken, I laugh at funny jokes. I can sometimes be shy, then go off on you when I'm mad. I have man-like muscles, but I am all woman.

Paula

It's so hard to say no to yourself when your body feels the urge to eat. The guilt that follows is almost unbearable. Part of my brain tells me to keep it down, the other tells me I'm a fat pig and I need to get rid of it. Ten guesses which one I choose. I've tried to stop many, many times, but I can't. The minute I have that delicious pepperoni pizza in my hand and I take that first bite, I say to myself, this is what I'm missing. You'd think I'm not missing much since I binge on food then throw it back up, but the biggest part of eating is that feeling of being filled up. That if you have one more bite, you'll explode. I don't have that feeling. Instead of still tasting that strawberry ice cream long after it's gone, I taste an acid that has mixed with that ice cream.

Like I've said, I've tried to stop: with the help of doctors, and parents, but mostly by myself. I go out with friends and inevitably, we end up going out to eat to some fast food joint, or a restaurant. I see them gobble down chicken sandwiches, French fries, hamburgers and pasta. They eat with no concern of calories or fat content. They joke about it, saying they really shouldn't be eating this, all the while stuffing their mouths. I look on with desire, the desire to not look at food as dangerous, to chew a grilled chicken sandwich covered in mayo and not feel the urge to throw it up.

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I don't know how to stop, I want to, but I can't. I feel boxed in by this disease with no cure. Why is food so bad for me? Why can't I realize what I'm doing to myself? It's not fair that I feel so ashamed. I hide behind my salads, diet cokes, and laxatives. What is there possibly to say to someone whose whole existence revolves around food. What can you say to me to get me well?

Black Barbie Speaks

I am no role model, so stop treating me like one. My only purpose in this life is for little girls to play with me. I hate that it's sending such a horrible message to them; it makes me ashamed what I am doing and have done to a whole generation of women. Especially the young black girls out there whose moms and dads buy me thinking I'll be a good image for them to see. What? Just because I have dark skin and I'm a Barbie means I'm a good idol. Look at me, I look like white Barbie; I have long silky hair, narrow hips, lean thighs, and a straight nose. Sure, now days everyone has recognized that fact, but what about the girls who bought me before thinking they were seeing their image in me. I'm just so ashamed.

I've always wanted to be a good role model. I wanted to be the reflection of black girls across America. I thought it would be good if they saw a doll with their variations in skin tone, broad hips, thicker thighs, the original full lips, and different lengths and styles of hair. But no, they had to make me a darker version of the true Barbie. You want to know a little secret; she hates her position too. She thinks it's bogus that she has been such an icon to millions and millions of women. She could kick herself for not standing up and saying, "Don't pick me for your ideal model. I'm not real."

Both of us hating having to be so perfect all the time. The hair is always in place; we're always wearing the right clothes, and wearing tons of makeup to supposedly make us look beautiful. I get so tired of being and looking perfect, acting so lady-like. I want to scream to the parents that pick one of us up, "No, don't you see what you're doing, you're giving your daughter false images to look up to." But to no avail. They always pick one of us up. One set of parents thinking their daughters will love to play dress up with Barbie, another set of parents just glad to see something so dark and glamorous for their daughter to have.

I will admit though, there is a lot more variety out there. Dolls now have wide hips, and broader noses, no matter what the race. I've even seen some of the black dolls with braids and afros. It's amazing for me to see this transition, but I still have to wonder about all those girls who looked up to me, when I was the only doll who was a reflection of them. Are they comfortable with their blackness; do they like their hair, no matter what the texture or length? Do they still cry at night wishing to be white? Are they mad at me because their life was not as perfect as mine seemed to be because I had white features? It doesn't matter what kind of progress dolls like me have made, we all wonder about those before the changes.

A Comfortable Woman

I am a comfortable woman.

Comfortable that I have opinions and I'm not afraid to tell you.

Comfortable that I am a size 14 with wide womanly hips and full breasts.

Comfortable that I have brown hair, and brown eyes instead of blond hair, and blue eyes.

I am a woman who is so comfortable that I can talk politics to anyone and feel I have something important to say.

Comfortable that I may not always find my size but I know it does not mean I don't exist.

I'm a woman who is comfortable standing beside or in front of a man, but never behind.

I am a woman who can channel her positive energies to help others instead of putting them down.

I'm a woman comfortable with every other woman around her, no matter what the size, age, or race.

I know I am one of the many gorgeous women who was comfortable enough with themselves to fight for the women who were not.



11901 Wornall Road
Kansas City, MO 64145
816-942-8400

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